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John Galsworthy, an appreciation and a bibliography

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JOHN  
GALSWORTHY

*An Appreciation  
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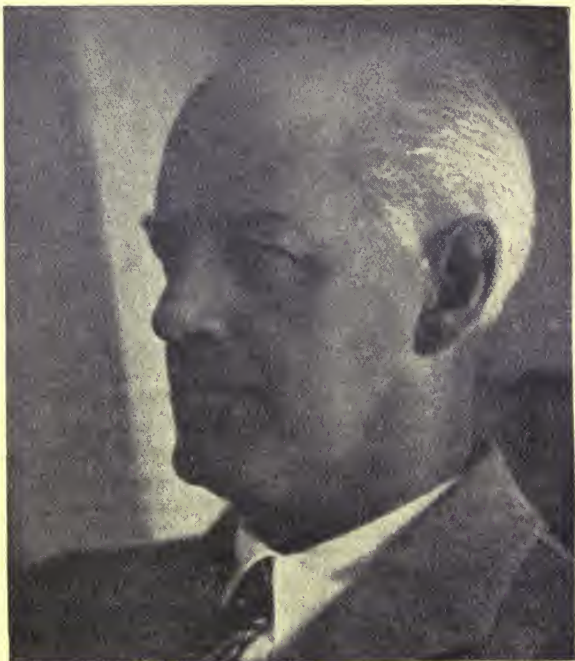
"He [Mr. Galsworthy] is a philosopher  
"and a poet, a mystic poet, yet the most  
"precise and systematic of realists. I  
"write this last word without any idea  
"of labelling him as belonging to a school;  
"I am not thinking of his manner, but of  
"the object of his art, determined by his  
"point of view. It is that of all great  
"artists possessed by the desire to seize  
"and express complete reality, not only  
"that which ordinary eyes perceive, but  
"the deeper spiritual reality, the mystery  
"of which haunts them, the power or the  
"idea they divine beneath the appearance  
"of a being or a thing, and try to reveal  
"to us by their interpretation of that  
appearance."

ANDRÉ CHEVRILLON  
in *Three Studies in English Literature:*  
*Kipling, Galsworthy, Shakespeare.*

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*John Labworth*

# JOHN GALSWORTHY

## AN APPRECIATION

**A**N outstanding feature of Galsworthy's work, both as novelist and playwright, is his sense of balance and of form; linked with this is a profound and shrewd power of penetration.

John Galsworthy is, by blood, entirely English. On his mother's side he comes of a family very long settled in Worcestershire; on his father's side of pure Devon stock.

He was born in 1867, educated at Harrow and at Oxford, called to the Bar in 1890 (but practised little). He travelled as a young man, meeting Joseph Conrad, a sailor at that time, on a sailing ship which carried him from Adelaide to South Africa. He has travelled much and widely ever since.

The artist in him developed in its own way, quietly, making no sky-rocket exhibition but continually growing, so that any reader may make the fascinating study of marking that growth from work to work; style, vision, depth, and grip of human character all increasing, and accompanied by the three characteristics he showed fairly soon—a feeling for atmosphere, a deep compassion, and a sense of satire.

He has always shunned publicity, and for many years spent most of his time buried away on Dartmoor. There the writer has seen him playing cricket with the village team (in such rough weather that they had to carry the bats in their pockets!) and at work round the hay-wain, helping to get a farmer's crop in when the sky showed signs of rain. There he spent his time writing and riding; while in the



evenings by candle-light, in the pretty, simple, white-walled room, Mrs. Galsworthy would play softly, the beech-logs would crackle on the open hearth, and dogs—many dogs, for all the farm dogs would collect on the verandah if they could—would watch devotedly, now and then heaving a deep sigh. That room comes back to one full of a gem-like glow of flowers and a particular sense of “reality,” intellectual reality—obtained not by excitement but by repose.

A large part of Galsworthy's work deals with people of leisure, their drama being essentially psychological, not so much the struggle of character against circumstance as the inner strife and reaction of human relationships. But he has also handled working-class characters with remarkable success, not only village types but city crowds and down-trodden, out-of-sight, submerged souls like Mrs. Jones, the charwoman, in his play *The Silver Box*, or Mrs. Hughes in *Fraternity*. Still, his work as a whole is chiefly a masterly unveiling of the people we see in the stalls of a theatre. In this respect he fills a place of his own among the writers of to-day.

It is not often that a great novelist is also a great dramatist, but this may be said of John Galsworthy. This dual achievement comes, perhaps, from his keen sense of “situation.” Many of his short tales are intensely dramatic “situations.” Some years ago a critic said of him that his novels fell short of his plays just because it was “situation” itself which interested him rather than development, so that he left his characters at the close of a novel much as we knew them at the beginning—the novel, as a form of art, lacking the powerful (thought-provoking) force of the “curtain,” which as a dramatist he knows so well how to use. But this has proved a false criticism. No one who has read the successive





Mr. Galsworthy's house: Grove Lodge, Hampstead.

Forsyte volumes can maintain a lack of development in either the gradually ageing or in the young growing characters, or in the scheme of the whole. Soames, in *The White Monkey*, has "developed" since the Soames of *The Man of Property*. In his preface to the *Manaton* volumes of *Villa Rubein and Other Stories*, Galsworthy, speaking of *The Island Pharisees*, says: "Like all the stories in *Villa Rubein*, and indeed most of my Tales, the book originated in the curiosity, philosophic reflections and un-philosophic emotions roused in me by some single figure in real life." It is character itself which interests Galsworthy, and perhaps that is why he has been so successful in portraying all the aspects of character revealed in family relationships. He has done it admirably in *Fraternity*, where two brothers are married to two sisters, and in *The Freelanders*, where we are shown the inter-relations between

three brothers and their very different wives and offspring; and in *The Forsyte Saga*, where he gives the whole foundations, walls and fortifications of a family group—with all a family's mutual likes, dislikes, loyalties, and irritations!

John Galsworthy is an artist in the sense that the Russian novelist Turgenev was an artist, and the great Frenchman, de Maupassant. These three writers do not try to give chunks of life in the rough, life just as it is, full of irrelevancies, crowded with distracting details and broken threads. Many modern writers have tried to reproduce this chaos, but the art I am speaking of is more exacting, it seeks to penetrate to the essentials so that it may *interpret* life, and to do this it must focus, eliminating what is not essential from what is. Self-restraint, delicacy, a fine sense of form, all are necessary to this type of art; no gush and no blood-and-thunder, and no intrusion of author standing between what he writes and his reader. That does not rule out personality; personality is like the scent of a flower—unseen but known, one of the most precious gifts of authorship.

As an artist Galsworthy has made an extraordinary advance. Some writers produce a vivid personal work, a masterpiece perhaps quite early, and never reach that level of expression again. Galsworthy is not among these, he found himself gradually.

The first four publications were issued under a pseudonym, "John Sinjohn." They were: *From the Four Winds*, a collection of short stories, not striking in any way; *Jocelyn*, *Villa Rubein*, and *A Man of Devon*. *Villa Rubein* is a genuine piece of objective work, but not yet definitely Galsworthy; it is full of good touches and excellent character drawing, and, now revised, makes a charming "long-short"—

JOHN GALSWORTHY



*At Manaton*

that is, a long study, not a full novel. *A Man of Devon*, like the former, was in its first form too long for its theme, but, shortened, gains considerably. It shows the artist's awakening power of interpretation dealing with atmosphere, the elusive atmosphere of a beautiful county, of a village, an old farm, and the mysterious atmosphere surrounding character.

*The Island Pharisees* is a different type of book; the artist has broken out of his form in an effort to find himself, and what we get is a weak book structurally, but the first definite "Galsworthy

flavour"—Galsworthy the satirist. It is a collection of keenly sketched portraits loosely strung together; unlike the preceding novels, it is an indictment of the people observed. It has the bitterness of young art and not yet the breadth of great art.

From this book Galsworthy passed straight to *The Man of Property*. In *The Man of Property* we have the perfectly balanced work of an artist who has found himself, mastered his tools, and come into his own. The book has backbone, its theme and its characters depend on each other and make each other. The writing of it has the fine restraint of real mastery, and also that pervading subtle sense of "personality" which hall-marks a great artist. The novel portrays the upper middle class in England towards the end of the last century, a protected class whose prosperity was founded on its sense of property. Into this close circle he introduces the intangible spirit of beauty—a woman, Irene, Soames Forsyte's wife. It is her drama, caught and caged by the man of property, and his—trying to possess what he cannot possess, trying to own the heart and soul of another as he owns his dividends, and in despite trying to hold a body when love has fled.

*The Country House* deals with another layer of society; it is full of shrewd humour, shown particularly in such characters as the Rev. Hussel Barter and in Horace Pendyce himself. But the triumph of the book is Margery Pendyce, the Squire's wife; refined, unselfish, tranquil, and courageous, and, above all, civilised with that fine essence of civilisation which shows itself in unselfconscious self-respect. She is, perhaps, the most perfectly drawn "gentlewoman" in contemporary literature. This novel also contains a memorable animal portrait



*Mrs. Galsworthy in the Garden at Manaton.*

—the “spaniel John,” known for ever to anyone who has read about him.

*Fraternity*, the next novel, again a picture of a class, differs from *The Country House* both in style and in essence. It deals with a more sophisticated portion of society, and so the artist is less humorous but more subtle. It is a great novel, the whole woven all of a piece; it is perfectly balanced. It

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deals with writers and painters, people who do creative work and who live introspectively and have imagination; not struggling artists, but people of means and leisure, who, because they have imagination, are aware of the poor, who feel the presence of their "shadows" in the streets, but who, because they are removed from life by security and "inwardness," have no practical ability. The rich and the poor are shown side by side, contrasting groups; but the novel is more than a class portrait, it has a human story, moving, thought-provoking, and inevitable in its climax. One character stands out among the "book people" and becomes real to us for ever after: Professor Stone, the old apostle of brotherhood, with his bag of crumbs and his bathe in the Serpentine, and his wistful single-mindedness.

*The Patrician* is a story of principle at war with passion; it is full of fine writing, the character of Audrey Noel is well drawn in its delicacy, depth and poignancy. Lord Miltoun, the "Patrician," a more difficult study, alienates us a little (just as the bone-dry aristocrat makes us shrink in real life); he is cruel in his adherence to his own innate creed of leadership. He cannot compromise; what he feels to be his own integrity is dearer to him than his own humanity.

*The Dark Flower* is a study of passion itself. It is differently handled and is not a "class" study at all. Passion as it comes to a man in innocent youth, in the strength of his manhood, and reviving to grip the senses in later life on the eve of age. The pages describing the awakening of love in the youth, Mark Lennan, are some of the most beautiful Galsworthy has written; it is the beauty of sheer simplicity, of the artist who knows how to use each word.

## JOHN GALSWORTHY

*The Freelanders* is a charmingly intimate study of a family and the pull between one age and the next; a novel which becomes very much of a friend.

*Beyond* differs from the rest of Galsworthy's work; it is a romance, vivid but less austere and with less of his particular "flavour."

*Saint's Progress*, a war-time book, shows the hard position of a would-be Christ-like man, a genuine priest, sincere and devout, discovering that his little daughter (unwed) is about to become a mother. It is the pull between ecclesiastical canons of right and wrong and the forgiveness Christ practised.



At Manaton.

The book was written during a broken, dislocated period, and suffers in consequence.

These last three novels are like three different experiments in different directions; then with *In Chancery*, a continuation to *The Man of Property*, we have the artist in full perfection again, on his own ground, in his own particular vein, and rendering his story as no one else could render it, because it issues, as it were, from the very spirit of his art.

There follow *To Let* and the two short studies, *Indian Summer of a Forsyte* and *Awakening*, making up the work named *The Forsyte Saga*.

*Indian Summer of a Forsyte* (first published in "Five Tales") is written with a special tenderness and charm; it epitomises the passing of an age, the age of balance and form and golden leisure. With the death of old Jolyon, the best of that age seems to pass.

*In Chancery* is vigorous and exciting and full of fine touches of satire. The "man of property," Soames Forsyte, and his wife, Irene, have been living apart; but now Soames wants a child to inherit his property; he would marry again. We see his efforts to obtain what he feels to be justice, and the painfulness of our system of rendering justice; and then we see that deep-rooted instinct to hold what is his, mastering even his own interest. He comes in contact with Irene (whom he is seeking to divorce) and, seeing her, wants her back: why should she escape and go to his cousin, who loves her and is willing to rescue her?

*Awakening* is a study of a child's mind. *The Forsyte Saga* has advanced another step on its march; this is the child of Irene and young Jolyon, and it is the "awakening" to beauty of this gay yet thoughtful

little boy; a child's crisis that is caught and crystallised for us.

*To Let* gives the next generation on the threshold of life; the little boy grown to a shy, loving-hearted, sensitive young man, not in the least a prig but really and truly human, one of the most lovable characters in fiction; and we see the child of Soames' second marriage, a girl, fascinating, provocative, full of the restless longings of modern youth, but with the fundamental Forsyte instinct of possession, and the added hardness of a new age with its self-will and egoism. *To Let* is the poignant love-story of these two young people separated by the family feud.

*The White Monkey*, which continues the Forsyte chronicles with the life of Soames' daughter to-day, is a very wonderful instance of the way in which a great artist assimilates the spirit of the times. One critic was grieved to find "modern slang" in a Galsworthy novel, but the very fact that this same writer who caught the measured pulse of the last days of the Victorian era so truly, has also caught the rapid pulse of modernism, and has given us a novel reflecting the very heart and mind and mood of youth among a certain class in post-war London, is an immense achievement.

*The Silver Spoon* continues the story of Fleur and Michael Mont, of Soames and the other Forsytes who have already appeared. It is a picture of the Monts in conflict: Fleur socially, Michael politically. *The Silver Spoon* is the second of the new trilogy, presenting modern England and the London we know in place of the town and country of our fathers and our uncles.

The *Forsyte* books as a whole make an epic in English fiction. They are full of humorous and



satirical (as well as tragic and beautiful) character studies. Who can forget the portly "Swithin," or the anxious, long-legged "James," or the old Aunts, for that matter? And who can forget "Montague Dartie," the very human "bounder" who married "Winifred," Soames' sister? One sees "Monty" forever with that carnation in his buttonhole, and one doesn't forget that home-coming, after his wild flutter, or the revealing touch of the cracked shoe! There are also young people besides the two I have mentioned at length: serious, grey-eyed "Holly" with a special charm of her own, and "Jolly" who perished in the South African war; and then "Val

Dartie," and "Michael Mont"—a character who "develops" very considerably.

Besides novels, verse and satires, including *The Burning Spear* (in which "Mr. Lavender," a modern Don Quixote with a Pickwickian flavour, sets out to fulfil all the urgent courses recommended by the Daily Press during the war, and shows up in his ridiculous adventures the contradictions and absurdities of the Press "stunts"), John Galsworthy has proved himself a master of short sketch writing and of "long-short" studies. A commentary of *The Inn of Tranquillity* are full of excellent short work.

And in the three volumes of *Caravan* are assembled all the short stories that Galsworthy has ever written. *A Stoic* is one of his best character studies; *The Apple Tree* a lyric in prose; the flying rapture of Spring and the pain of Spring embodied in a love-story with Devon for its background. *The Juryman* is a piece of psychology very subtle and very human. *The First and the Last* deals with a terrible situation. The tales have been dealt with in an interesting way. Wherever the author has two studies dealing with a similar theme, or with some fundamental resemblance, he has placed them side by side, the earlier one preceding the later; the reader can in this way see what alterations of vision and treatment the developing artist uses. Thus you may enjoy *A Man of Devon* (reprinted here) and *The Apple Tree* in tandem; or *Spindleberries*, with its flying rainbow effect of Beauty uncapturable, sensed in a thousand moods, and the short sketch *Salta Pro Nobis* (also dealing with Beauty), showing the last hours of a dancer (at a French convent) about to be shot as a spy. This sketch is written with rare simplicity, delicacy and restraint, and masterly is the apt way







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We care much more about the fortunes of the Forsytes than we do about those of our friends and neighbours, which proves how much nearer they are to us. No one has depicted so accurately that deadly struggle between passion and our loyalties that threatens to be our lifelong fight. There may come a time when the English people will be blind to the quiet dignity and peerless beauty of their countryside, and stop their ears against the appeals of tradition and honour. Until that time comes Mr. Galsworthy is sure of an ever wider appreciation. With the "Forsyte Saga" he may lay claim to have written the most distinguished and most significant contemporary English novel, and in Soames and his daughter to have created two people so pulsating with life that they take their place with Falstaff and Sancho Panza, Squire Western, and Elizabeth Bennet.—*Daily Telegraph*.

Soames Forsyte is dead! His dust is mingled with that of Falstaff and Tom Jones and Mr. Micawber and W. G. Grace and the Duke of Wellington—creatures so national, so typical, so essential that nobody pauses to remember whether this one or that of them came to birth in an epic or an epoch. Some characters in books we praise because they live: but the greatest are those who have the vitality to die. Soames Forsyte is dead!—GERALD GOULD in *The Observer*.

This chapter of Soame's death is very beautiful, as fine as anything that Mr. Galsworthy has ever done. *Swan Song* in its restraint, economy and pathos is a beautiful ending to a fine work.—HUGH WALPOLE in *The Spectator*.

"The foundation of Mr. Galsworthy's talent, it seems to me, lies in a remarkable power of ironic insight combined with an extremely keen and faithful eye for all the phenomena on the surface of the life he observes. These are the purveyors of his imagination, whose servant is a style clear, direct, sane, illumined by a perfect unaffected sincerity. It is the style of a man whose sympathy with mankind is too genuine to allow him the smallest gratification of his vanity at the cost of his fellow-creatures . . . sufficiently pointed to carry deep his remorseless irony and grave enough to be the dignified vehicle of his profound compassion. Its sustained harmony is never interrupted by those bursts of cymbals and fifes which some deaf people acclaim for brilliance. Before all it is a style well under control, and therefore it never betrays this tender and ironic writer into an odious cynicism of laughter and tears.

"From laboriously collected information I am led to believe that most people read novels for amusement. This is as it should be. But whatever be their motives, I entertain towards all novel-readers the feelings of warm and respectful affection. I would not try to deceive them for worlds. Never! This being understood, I go on to declare, in the peace of my heart and the serenity of my conscience, that if they want amusement they shall find it between the covers of this book. They shall find plenty of it in this episode in the history of the Forsytes, where the reconciliation of a father and son, the dramatic and poignant comedy of Soames Forsyte's marital relations, and the tragedy of Bossiney's failure are exposed to our gaze with the remorseless yet sympathetic irony of Mr. Galsworthy's art, in the light of the unquenchable fire burning on the altar of property. They shall find amusement, and perhaps also something more lasting—if they care for it. I say this with all the reserves and qualifications which strict truth requires around every statement of opinion. Mr. Galsworthy will never be found futile by anyone, and never uninteresting by the most exacting."

## JOSEPH CONRAD

(in an article in the *Outlook* on John Galsworthy's  
*The Man of Property*, published in 1906)



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